

~~SECRET~~  
CONTROLLED DISSEM

*file*  
NIE 11-14-63 ADVCON

8 January 1964

*NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE*

CAPABILITIES OF THE SOVIET GENERAL PURPOSE FORCES  
1963-1969

- Soviet Theater Forces
- Naval General Purpose Forces
- Contribution of East European Satellites
- General War Capabilities against NATO
- Limited War Capabilities
- Trends to 1970

NOTE: This is an advance copy of the conclusions of this estimate as approved by the United States Intelligence Board. The complete text will be circulated within five days of this issuance.

*Central Intelligence Agency*

~~SECRET~~  
CONTROLLED DISSEM

*Submitted by the*

**DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE**

*The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate: The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Defense, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, AEC and NSA.*

*Concurred in by the*

**UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD**

*on 8 January 1964. Concurring were the Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State; The Director, Defense Intelligence Agency; the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army; the Assistant Chief of Naval Operations (Intelligence), Department of the Navy; the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF; the Atomic Energy Commission Representative to the USIB; and the Director of the National Security Agency. The Assistant Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, abstained, the subject being outside of his jurisdiction.*

**CLASSIFICATION OF TITLE IS OFFICIAL USE ONLY  
WHEN USED SEPARATELY**

GROUP 1 EXCLUDED FROM AUTOMATIC DOWNGRADING AND DECLASSIFICATION
--

34518

**WARNING**

**This material contains information affecting the National Defense of the United States within the meaning of the espionage laws, Title 18, USC, Secs. 793 and 794, the transmission or revelation of which in any manner to an unauthorized person is prohibited.**

C E N T R A L   I N T E L L I G E N C E   A G E N C Y

8 January 1964

SUBJECT: NIE 11-14-63: CAPABILITIES OF THE SOVIET GENERAL PURPOSE  
FORCES, 1963-1969

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the role and capabilities of Soviet general purpose forces over the next six years, especially against the NATO area in Europe.

FOREWORD

As considered in this estimate Soviet general purpose forces include: (a) theater forces, i.e., ground combat and tactical air forces plus their associated command, support and service elements up through the level of military districts and groups of forces; (b) naval general purpose forces, i.e., naval forces subordinate to fleets and separate flotillas, including naval air forces, but excluding strategic attack missile submarine forces; and (c) military airlift and sealift elements. In addition, Soviet command

S-E-C-R-E-T

GROUP 1  
Excluded from automatic  
downgrading and  
declassification

S-E-C-R-E-T

and service elements providing general support to all components of the Soviet military establishment are considered where appropriate. Those Soviet forces which perform other military missions, notably long-range striking forces and air and missile defense forces, are the subject of other National Intelligence Estimates,\* and are discussed herein only insofar as they might be used in support of theater operations.

It should be emphasized that, in discussing Soviet theater forces and their capabilities, we do not take account of the actions of opposing Western forces. In particular, we do not assess the effect on Soviet theater forces of an initial strategic nuclear exchange. It is obvious that such an exchange would profoundly affect the ability of Soviet theater forces to carry out their assigned missions in a general war.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A. Soviet requirements for general purpose forces are the subject of a continuing debate within the Soviet leadership. Russian and

---

\* NIE 11-8-63, "Soviet Capabilities for Strategic Attack," dated 18 October 1963 (TOP SECRET) and Memorandum to Holders of NIE 11-3-62, "Soviet Bloc Air and Missile Defense Capabilities Through Mid-1967, dated 20 November 1963 (TOP SECRET).

S-E-C-R-E-T

## S-E-C-R-E-T

Communist tradition alike prescribe the maintenance of large ground forces in being as well as a large mobilization potential. Conservative elements, both military and political, argue that this tradition remains valid, even in the circumstances of a nuclear general war. Khrushchev, however, with some military and political support, stresses the deterrent effect of medium, intermediate, and intercontinental range ballistic missiles and argues that Soviet requirements for general purpose forces are consequently reduced. This debate remains unresolved, but in general, the trend in the size of Soviet general purpose forces over the years since Khrushchev came to power has been downward. (Paras. 1-7, 12, 15)

B. We estimate that the personnel strength of Soviet general purpose forces now includes 1.6-1.8 million men in theater ground forces, about 400,000 in naval units, and about 150,000 in tactical and military transport aviation. In addition, there are roughly 400,000 men performing command and general support functions for the entire military establishment.\* General purpose forces are estimated to include: 110-140 line divisions; about 350 torpedo attack and cruise missile

\* Thus the total manpower in the Soviet military establishment is estimated to be approximately as follows:

Command and General Support	400,000
General Purpose Forces	2,150,000-2,350,000
Ground	(1,600,000-1,800,000)
Air	(150,000)
Naval	(400,000)
Strategic Defense Forces	400,000
Strategic Attack Forces	300,000
TOTAL	3,250,000-3,450,000

S-E-C-R-E-T

submarines; about 180 major surface ships; about 3,400 tactical fighters and light bombers; and about 375 naval jet medium bombers. (Paras. 15, 18-19, 21, 32, 62-64, 67-68)

C. The Soviet ground forces are formidable and modern, with a large number of combat strength divisions backed up by a large mobilization potential. All presently existing divisions have been at least nominally converted to one of three types: tank, motorized rifle, or airborne. The modernization program has made heavy demands on resources in short supply in the USSR, and we believe that Soviet ground force capabilities are still adversely affected by quantitative and qualitative deficiencies in equipment. (Paras. 8-10, 22-25, 39-40, 42-43)

D. During the past several years, the Soviets have reduced the total number of their divisions and have also reduced the proportion maintained at high levels of combat readiness. We estimate that 60-75 Soviet divisions are now maintained at combat strength, i.e., at 85 percent or more of total authorized wartime personnel strength. The remainder are at either reduced strength (60-70 percent of authorized personnel) or at cadre strength (25 percent or less). Even at full wartime strength, Soviet divisions are considerably smaller than US divisions. The authorized wartime strength of tank divisions is about 9,000 men, and of motorized rifle divisions, about 11,000. Most divisions are organized into armies, which are also quite small by US

## S-E-C-R-E-T

standards. The nondivisional combat and service support elements presently maintained are probably considerably short of wartime requirements. (Paras. 8-10, 15-17, 22-28, 37-40, 42-43)

E. Currently there are 22 combat strength Soviet divisions and about 1,200 Soviet tactical aircraft in East Germany and Poland. Without prior buildup, this force could launch a limited objective attack, designed to maximize the chance of achieving surprise. We believe, however, that the Soviets would seek to assemble a considerably larger striking force if they intended to launch a campaign against Western Europe. Reinforcements could be drawn from western USSR and from the Satellite forces. We estimate that under noncombat conditions a 50-60 division striking force, including some 5-15 Satellite divisions, could be assembled and organized for operations against Western Europe within about 30 days after a Soviet decision to do so.\* In addition, such a force might include some 2,000 tactical aircraft and be backed

---

\* In terms of manpower, these divisions and their support would include:

Soviet ground troops normally stationed in East Germany and Poland	330,000
Soviet ground troops from Western USSR	480,000
Satellite ground troops	100,000-300,000
TOTAL	910,000-1,110,000

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

up by a theater reserve of ground units. The Soviets would not expect to reinforce on such a scale without detection. (Paras. 91-94)

F. In recent years, Soviet theater forces have acquired important tactical missile capabilities, including unguided rockets and ballistic and cruise missiles. Nuclear and toxic chemical bombs and warheads have been provided for tactical use; we believe that their release is kept under strict political control. (Paras. 14, 33-36, 49-55)

G. With the provision of tactical and air defense missiles for the support of theater forces, the strength of Tactical Aviation was sharply reduced but has remained fairly stable since 1961. The number of tactical aircraft seems low in relation to the size of the theater ground forces. Moreover, most tactical aircraft are obsolescent. Fighter-bombers have been conspicuously lacking, although such a type is now being introduced. Theater force air defense is limited by the lack of surface-to-air missile systems for low altitude defense and for rapidly moving situations. (Paras. 31-32, 45-46, 48)

H. Until recent years, the Soviet Navy has been equipped and trained for a primarily defensive role. Much of the impetus for change has come from the USSR's concern over the threat posed by carrier task forces and US missile submarines. To counter the former forces at sea, the Soviets have introduced cruise missiles carried by bombers

- 6 -

S-E-C-R-E-T



S-E-C-R-E-T

and submarines. Soviet antisubmarine warfare capabilities are negligible in open ocean areas and probably will remain quite limited, but capabilities for reconnaissance against carrier task forces have been improved by employment of aircraft of Long Range Aviation. The Soviet submarine force poses an increasing threat to Free World shipping, primarily in the northeastern Atlantic and northwestern Pacific areas. Soviet surface ships are largely dependent upon land-based air cover and their capabilities are correspondingly restricted. (Paras. 60-61, 70-75, 95, 113)

I. There are an estimated 940,000 men in the East European Satellite ground forces (excluding Albania). These forces have about 62 divisions at various levels of strength and effectiveness. We believe that about half of these divisions are sufficiently manned and equipped for early employment in conjunction with Soviet forces. Their political reliability would remain an uncertain factor in some circumstances. (Paras. 78-83)

J. During the past year, the Soviets appear to have modified somewhat their expectation that any major conflict in Europe would either be nuclear from the start or would inevitably escalate. Their recent writings indicate that some thought has been given to the possibility of non-nuclear war in Europe. While Soviet capabilities to conduct non-nuclear warfare remain formidable, efforts to gear their theater forces for nuclear

- 7 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

operations have had some adverse effects on conventional capabilities. The USSR's capabilities for limited warfare in areas remote from its borders remain severely limited. (Paras. 100-104)

K. For at least the next few years the size and composition of Soviet general purpose forces will probably be governed by compromises in a continuing debate within Soviet ruling circles rather than by any clearly-defined strategic and political concept. Economic considerations, Sino-Soviet relations, and developments within NATO will be critical factors influencing the future of Soviet theater forces. In our view, the chances are good that the number of personnel and divisions in theater ground forces will decline moderately over the next six years. Modernization of ground, naval, and air general purpose forces will tend to correct current deficiencies. (Paras. 7, 105-116)

- 8 -

S-E-C-R-E-T